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ABSTRACT

In order to develop strategies for training future journalists, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research sponsored a survey of all journalists in all branches of the profession in New Zealand in 1987. The response rate was over 46%; 1,249 New Zealand journalists returned the survey. Major findings revealed that: (1) the proportion of female journalists is steadily increasing; (2) journalism continues to be a "young" profession; (3) less than 5% of the respondents were members of ethnic minorities; (4) most journalists had been educated in New Zealand state schools, and nearly two-thirds had some university study; (5) over one-third had attended a formal pre-entry training course prior to entering journalism; (6) over 60% been working in journalism for less than 10 years and over one-third had chosen it as their first job; (7) considerable numbers of journalists had worked overseas; (8) a large majority judged off-the job training to be valuable; (9) fewer than one-third had received formal in-office training in the previous 10 years, but those who had received training judged it to be helpful; (10) encouragement from superiors is regarded as the most important influence in the professional development of journalists, together with on-going training and preentry training; (11) 91% believed their own organization should provide more training, and 89% felt there was a case for increased training nationally, with training in research/critical analysis and grammar being the most pressing areas. (ARH)

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF NEW ZEALAND JOURNALISTS

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National Survey of New Zealand Journalists

A Summary Report

By Geoff Lealand

New Zealand Council for Educational Research

The Survey

The research project was first proposed by the Journalists Training Board in late 1986. Their desire was to see an up-to-date survey of New Zealand journalists, in order to develop strategies for training in the near future. Dr Geoff Lealand, Research Officer with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research was contracted to take on this task and after a trial survey in Wellington, the distribution of a detailed, 13-page questionnaire throughout New Zealand was begun in May 1987. In the absence of a master list of all NZ journalists, a variety of distribution routes were used, namely: bulk distribution to large news organisations (metropolitan, provincial and community newspapers, magazines, radio, TVNZ), membership lists (e.g. Public Relations Institute of New Zealand membership, New Zealand Journalists' Union list of freelancers), and personal contacts. The aim was to reach all journalists in all branches of the profession. By June 1987, nearly 3000 questionnaires had been distributed nationally and by October 1987, the cut-off point for returns, 1,249 completed questionnaires were in.

Although the original aim was to achieve a *census survey*, eventual returns meant that the final results are from a *sample* of NZ journalists, albeit a very substantial sample. When compared with both the Labour Force figures of the 1986 census and New Zealand Journalists' Union/Northern Journalists' Union membership, the 1,249 journalists in this survey represent slightly less than half (46.6%) of the profession. Nevertheless, this number exceeds previous surveys of journalists, both in New Zealand and overseas. Campbell and Cleveland's 1972 study, for example, used a sample of 418 New Zealand newspaper journalists. Weaver and Wilhoit used the views of 1,001 American journalists to construct their *The American Journalist: a portrait of US newspeople and their work* (1986). The following results can claim, with some justification, to represent the views and attitudes of New Zealand journalists. Those who participated are, arguably, those who share an interest in issues of training and professional development. They have provided an unprecedented, data-rich portrait of journalism in New Zealand. This account, designed for wide distribution, is a distillation of these views and attitudes, which appear in greater detail in the larger report which was presented to the Journalists Training Board in April 1988.

Characteristics of New Zealand Journalists

Studies of Australian and North American journalists show that the profession in those countries is dominated by politically moderate or 'left-leaning', college or university educated, white Protestant males in their early thirties. The 1972 survey of New Zealand newspaper journalists by Campbell and Cleveland showed that they too were similarly young and male (82 percent). A 1980 survey by the Journalists Training Board, however, showed that the number of female journalists in New Zealand was increasing. Of their sample of 1,000 newspaper, magazine and radio journalists, two-thirds were male and one-third female.

This survey shows that the trend towards an increased 'feminisation' of New Zealand journalism has continued.

Position By Sex

position	*number*[1]	*male (%)*	*female (%)*
cadet	21	43	57
reporter	458	40	60
specialist/feature reporter	76	64	36
assistant/chief reporter	70	67	33
sub/chief sub editor	203	63	37
deputy/assistant editor	26	85	15
editor/senior editor	126	66	34
specialist editor	72	72	28
leader writer/columnist	13	85	15
photographer	26	77	23
proof reader	28	25	75
researcher	13	23	77
public relations consultant	30	47	53
press secretary	13	62	28
freelance	17	47	53

[1]Ten or more mentions. Not included are branch/regional reps (9), marketing/communications directors (7), part-timers (5), tutors (5), as well as others (26).

Males still dominate journalism in New Zealand (both in numbers and by the positions they hold) but the proportion of female journalists is steadily increasing. In the near future, a 50:50 ratio is likely to be reached, but such a division of male and female is not reflected in the number of positions of responsibility held by women, as the table shows.

If a 50:50 ratio is regarded as the theoretical ideal, nearly all areas of the media have a long way to go in the allocation of senior positions with responsibility to female journalists. Even though one-third of editors or senior editors in the above table are women, these tend to be editorships of specialised magazines, or in broadcasting. There is no female editor of a major metropolitan newspaper.

Women also occupy most of the supportive or clerical roles in the profession, such as proof reading and research. But given that junior positions (cadet, reporter) are dominated by females, greater opportunity for rising in the ranks will need to be provided in the future, especially in middle and senior management.

Age

Journalism continues to be a 'young' profession. In Campbell and Cleveland's survey, 76 percent were aged 39 years or younger. This survey shows that the profession is growing a little older, with 70 percent in the same age group. Also 34 percent are aged 20–29, compared with the 48 percent in the same age group in Campbell and Cleveland.

Amongst the youngest journalists (15–24 years), there are two females to every male. Only in the 35–39 age group is there a near balance between males and females. Males predominate in the older age groups, in quite a marked fashion.

As might be expected, younger respondents occupy junior positions in large numbers. In the 20–24 age group, for example, over 60 percent are reporters. Conversely, older journalists occupy senior positions in greater numbers. Nevertheless, some positions (sub editor or chief sub editor, for example) are held by fairly equal numbers of younger and older journalists.

Age by Sex

age group	*number*	*male (%)*	*female (%)*	*total (%)*
15–19 years	69	32	68	6
20–24	198	33	67	16
25–29	224	39	61	18
30–34	198	60	40	16
35–39	174	56	44	14
40–44	139	73	27	11
45–49	88	71	29	7
50–54	66	71	29	5
55 years or more	72	80	20	6

Ethnicity

The number of Maori, Pacific Island, and other ethnic minorities working in journalism are few, comprising less than five percent of the survey. Of the 1,227 who indicated their ethnicity, 28 are Maori, 16 European/Maori, 2 Samoan, 4 other Pacific Islander, 3 Indian and 4 Chinese. There were 17 "others", which included journalists of Welsh, Polish, Malaysian and other extractions.

Journalists from minority backgrounds held few positions of responsibility or seniority. There is only one Maori editor in the sample but fifteen at the reporter level.

Marriage and children

More male journalists than female journalists are married, or living in de facto relationships. A majority (52%) of female journalists are single, compared with less than one-third (30%) of males. The proportion of single females in journalism is nearly double the proportion of single females in the general New Zealand population.

Possibly deflating a popular myth about the profession, the separation and divorce rate in this population of journalists is lower than in the general population. Some 6.6 percent of males and 7.9 percent of females were separated or divorced, compared with the 1986 census figures of 7.0 percent and 8.3 percent.

Over one-third of journalists have one or more dependent children, but families are small in the majority of cases.

Participating News Organisations

News organisations were categorised by type, rather than by name, to ensure anonymity. Newspapers contributed most responses but there were sizeable contributions from other areas of the media.

A majority of respondents had held their present position for a short period, with 65 percent being two years or less in their current job.

The Education of Journalists

Most (91%) had been educated in New Zealand and most (80%) had attended state schools, either co-ed or single-sex. A majority (83%) had left school with Sixth Form Certificate or a higher qualification.

Nearly two-thirds (832) had done some university study. Of these, 468 had completed a university degree or diploma, demonstrating that the general education level of the profession is on the rise. In the Campbell and Cleveland study, for example, only 9 percent had completed a university degree. Over three-quarters regard their tertiary studies as either essential or helpful to their work.

Types of News Organisations

	number[1]	%
metropolitan daily newspaper	318	26
provincial daily newspaper	379	31
community newspaper	90	7
weekly newspaper	47	4
TVNZ	73	6
Radio New Zealand	84	7
private radio	33	3
magazine/trade publication	104	8
public relations	19	2
institution/community body	14	1
government department/corporation	36	3
freelance/part-time	13	1

[1] more than 10 mentions

One half had had some experience with new information-technology, but newspaper journalists have had the lowest level of such contact.

Fewer than half used shorthand in their work and only a minority have had to learn specific technical skills.

Few (100) can speak Maori, with most of these possessing simple conversational skills. Many more (390) are familiar with a second language other than Maori.

Over half felt inadequately prepared to cover Maori news, with a significant proportion (25%) indicating they were indifferent to this issue, or felt it did not apply to them.

Pre-entry Training

Of the 1,249 respondents, over one-third (35%) had attended a formal pre-entry training course prior to entering journalism. Wellington Polytechnic had produced the most graduates. More females (58%) than males had completed such training. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those who had done pre-entry training graduated in the period 1980–1987.

A majority rated the course they took favourably, as preparation for work generally. Graduates of the WP course tended to be less favourably disposed towards

Pre-entry Graduates

	number
Wellington Polytechnic (WP)	186
ATI	152
University of Canterbury (UC)	71
Waiariki (WK)	8
Manakau (MK)	2
Other	21
	440

their training but their complaints can now be seen as largely historical criticisms, as restructuring of this course took place in late 1987. When asked if their training had adequately equipped them for their specific job, there were more negative assessments of each course. Although the ATI rated very highly as preparation for work generally (93% rated it 'excellent' or 'good'), fewer rated it similarly as preparation for their current job (59% rated it 'excellent' or 'good'). In all cases, a majority of graduates considered there had been a good balance between theory and practical work in their course, although a significant proportion of both WP and UC graduates thought their training had been 'too academic'. Similarly, a majority considered the range of topics offered had been adequate, although around one-quarter of WP and UC graduates thought the range of topics could have been widened, to include areas such as Maori reporting, story construction and styles, and media law.

Course Workload

	too demanding (%)	*about right* (%)	*undemanding* (%)
ATI	7	83	5
WP	1	38	60
UC	2	75	23

Over half of the WP graduates and nearly one-quarter of the UC graduates considered their training had not been demanding.

Practical work experience was seen to be the greatest strength of the ATI course, whilst the strength of the WP course lay in its teaching of specific skills such as shorthand. Insufficient coverage of radio or television news skills was seen as a weakness, especially in the UC course.

Work Experience and Job Mobility

Over sixty percent of those who returned questionnaires had been working in journalism for less than ten years and over one-third (36%) had chosen it as their first job. More (59%) had worked elsewhere prior to entering journalism, in a variety of occupations, and one-third had worked in high status, professional occupations.

Most took up journalism to fulfil a desire to use their writing abilities, to put a love of words and ideas to a practical end, or to reach a wide audience. There were also 'people-oriented' journalists who welcomed the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people. One described journalism as 'an honourable profession' but others seemed to have revised their original expectations. One journalist wrote (rather facetiously); 'The money, the girls, the glamour! God, how wrong I was!'

Most had remained in their first job for a short time and worked for one or two employers. Nearly forty percent had left journalism for short or extended periods, with overseas travel being the most frequent reason (especially for males), whilst more than 70 females had left to bear or raise children.

Journalists tend to move between the various sectors of the media in considerable numbers but this movement is not necessarily one-way. The drift is pictured as being from print or electronic media to public relations. Although public relations draws recruits from these sources, some journalists ultimately return to newspapers, radio or television work. Many newspaper journalists have worked for magazines, for example, but in most cases this has been on a part-time basis.

Overseas Experience

Considerable numbers of journalists have been employed as journalists overseas, with Australia and the United Kingdom as the most popular destinations. Australia and the Pacific region were the most frequent destinations for overseas assignments. Only a few (2%) had studied journalism overseas and six percent had received overseas grants or fellowships.

Off-the-Job Training

General journalism/writing and training for sub-editors were the two most popular types of off-the-job training, organised by bodies such as the Journalists Training Board, BCNZ, Development Finance Corporation, and universities. Some courses covered more general aspects of journalism (such as media law and interviewing) whilst others were job-specific (voice/speech presentation, video editing).

Such courses were generally judged to be beneficial. A large majority also judged this sort of training to be valuable in its contribution to their professional development. Reporters and sub editors were the most favourably disposed to such training.

Formal In-Office Training

Fewer than one-third (28%) had received formal in-office training in the previous ten years. Training mainly took the form of guidance in job-related skills and general supervision.

Such training was held on a regular basis in less than half the number of cases but was also judged to be either very helpful or helpful. Most wanted to see in-office training continue but with changes in its content, timing, and regularity.

The Professional Development of Journalists

Encouragement from superiors is regarded as the most important influence in the professional development of journalists, together with on-going training and pre-entry training. A large number of journalists (46%) judged the response they received from superiors to be inadequate.

Colleagues were regarded as the most important source of encouragement and helpful criticism by most journalists. Feedback is sought in the work place rather than via other sources. Few pay much attention to systematic audience research, for example. As research elsewhere has also shown, New Zealand journalists look inwards to the work place for the confirmation and legitimisation of their role.

Nearly 300 journalists had experienced some sort of barrier to advancement. Of these, nearly one-third (98) were female journalists who had encountered sexual discrimination. Other barriers were age discrimination (either 'too young' or 'too old'), broken service, and the lack of training or qualifications.

Most (86%) said they were satisfied with their choice of journalism as a career. Nevertheless, nearly one-half (49%) of those in the population had considered leaving journalism for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of salary advancement, because they were 'bored' or disliked management structures, or because they wished to escape the stress and tension in their job.

Future Training Needs

These journalists were asked to identify training needs in their own office or organisation, what was needed nationally, and what they would like themselves. A large majority (91%) consider their own organisation should provide more training, with cadet training, writing styles/techniques, grammar, news identification/analysis heading the list. Nearly as many (89%) consider there is a case for increased training nationally, with training in research/critical analysis and grammar being the most pressing areas.

The top ten topics for personal training are:

Personal Training Needs

1. writing styles/techniques
2. financial reporting
3. research/critical analysis
4. subediting
5. interviewing techniques
6. new technology/computers
7. taha Maori/language
8. layout/illustration
9. media law/ethics
10. grammar/English usage

Outside Interests

Despite the difficulties of the job, a significant number (52%) of journalists are actively involved in sport. Few are actively involved in political parties and community affairs (perhaps to maintain an 'objective distance'?) but membership of church congregations and cultural organisations is quite high. Journalists tend to be occasional film-goers, light-to-moderate television viewers (with a 'reality' bias in their programme choices), and regular radio listeners and magazine readers. Irrespective of the area of the media they worked for, a large majority read at least one newspaper daily. A minority also read overseas papers regularly.

Newspapers were the popular source for catching up on the day's news, followed by radio and television news. Over one-third varied their daily news source, or used all options.

Conclusions

This report is explicit, offering, for example, many suggestions for improving training. It is also implicit, for it suggests that the shifting demographic profile of the profession will bring changes. It provides information that is without precedent and a data-rich portrait of the current state of journalism in New Zealand.

It also demonstrates that much of the often-expressed public distrust of 'the media' is based on a set of half truths and misunderstandings. Of course, such prejudice tends to be exacerbated by the inward looking tendencies of the profession. Nevertheless, the journalists who participated in this survey show that they care deeply about their profession, are aware of its shortcomings, and are willing to make improvements. There is a optimism in their growing appreciation of the value of training, both before taking on a job and on-the-job. There is also hope that the dominance of male perspectives will be leavened by an increasing 'feminisation' that can change traditional structures and ways of seeing and doing things. As the author of this report I side with the remarks of a reporter on a provincial newspaper, who wrote, 'I hope use is made of the findings. We could all do with improvement'.

Geoff Lealand
Research Officer
NZCER May 1988

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